

Howard

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SPEAKERS

Robert Curvin, William Howard, Ingrid Betancourt

Robert Curvin 00:10

We're on now we're recording. What I want to do is just ask you to just say a little bit about, say who you are, that you're doing this for educational purposes, voluntarily. And that, uh, and then we're going to talk a little bit about how you got to Newark, and what you think about Newark. And I'll ask you a series of questions.

William Howard 00:31

Hi my name is Bill Howard, I'm Pastor of Bethany church in in the city of Newark, New Jersey. And I'm doing this interview under duress, because my friend, Bob Curvin said, you have to do this. But I participate with grave doubt about the value of what I have to say. But I'm here to say it.

Robert Curvin 00:52

I knew you would do a great job.

Ingrid Betancourt 00:54

Okay. Is the music is it alright?

Robert Curvin 00:56

You can turn it down a little bit. Yeah, that would be good. Thank you.

William Howard 01:04

Now I'm going to the library to see this to see if you edit it out

R

Robert Curvin 01:07

Okay. No, I'm not gonna I'm not gonna edit it out. Anyway, let me let me start by asking you, you know, you were in New York, doing wonderful work at Theological Seminary Union. And suddenly, here you are, you came to Newark better than 10 years ago now? And what brought you to Newark?

W

William Howard 01:30

Yes. Well, I was at New York theological, which is, of course, today, even the largest theological school in the state of New York. And, frankly, my days were a bit predictable. We were very, we had a great team. And the President mostly presided at meetings of the team and, and spent a lot of time cultivating donors. But the pastor of Bethany, James Arthur Scott, came to visit me a few times there. And on one of the visits, raised the question, how long did I think I would want to do what I was doing. And it never occurred to me that I wouldn't do this until I retired, whatever that means. But that was the beginning of a conversation that brought me into the orbit of Bethany. Now, I'd spoken at Bethany at his invitation before, but it had never occurred to me that I would serve here. I read about Newark, and what was said to be happening in Newark, I had come to the NJPAC and seen the beautiful, you know, presentations that were going on there. And so I would say that it was really in a process of discernment that I discovered this was the next aspect of my ministry, keeping in mind now that I had been involved in a, an ecclesiastical assignment for nearly 30 years, back for 20 years before going to that theological school, I was involved in a national denomination with international responsibility. But somewhere in the midst(mixed), I was asked the question, since I had been espousing certain things that I felt churches should be engaged in, if it ever occurred to me to practice what I preached. So I, I think, as I look back, the process went swiftly. And there was a bit of mystery engaged in or involved in this process, a lot of wonderful people, encouraging me including my wife. And so we came, we interviewed with the with the leaders and, and in a fairly short time thereafter, the church voted to have me come. And that was one year before I came roughly one year before I came.

R

Robert Curvin 04:27

Now what's what is so I know that Bethany is special. But let me hear from the pastor. What is What is really special about Bethany?

W

William Howard 04:39

Well, I think Bethany is blessed to have more than its fair share of really capable people, lay people, people with formal training people with all kinds of rich experiences in terms of their work life as well as in their personal adventure's whether it is a well traveled congregation, internationally and so forth, it is a congregation that is compatible with my own outlook, in some ways. And I think Bethany is also conservative in some ways. And that comes with being established going concern for 140 years. So there are rich traditions here, which I happen to

like. But it is a church open to new ideas, one case in point is the now thriving Jazz Vespers. Which in, I think in January, we hosted Jon Faddis. No, that was February Jon Faddis, world renowned trumpet player. And there was literally no seat in the house. So the fact that a black Baptist Church is hosting a Jazz Vespers is quite a progressive thing. Although the truth is, the root music of jazz has its origins in the church. And Bethany is a church that in the main gets that. Now, there are many other aspects in terms of the kinds of community outreach things that we do. But I think this potential is what made Bethany attractive, attractive to me. Now, my wife and I came to visit on a Sunday morning, at the invitation of Dr. Scott. This was before the church decided or that we decided, and we noted that the persons who joined the church were then referred to a group of officers. And that person was taken someplace, you know, in the back of the church, to learn that they would be subject to a new membership course, that they needed to complete. So my wife, having come from Virginia, and I'm from Georgia, we're accustomed to new members in the baptist church being voted in on the spot. But the idea that one would be required to actually go through a training program in preparation for membership impressed us, that's a little clue to how we operate. It's not to everybody's taste

R

Robert Curvin 07:34

Is that still-what you do

W

William Howard 07:35

it's very much a part (unintelligible) And it's it's what an institution does, Bethany, as an institution, pastors, lay people come and go, but there are certain institutional features about Bethany, that helps it to sustain its ministry over many years to come, in my view.

R

Robert Curvin 07:59

Now, as an observer, and weekday attender. I also see Bethany as a very important force in the in the in the panoply of organizations and civic groups and public institutions and so on, within the city and the state. And how do you, how do you balance that with the attention that I'm sure is absolutely critical to a flock of 1000s of people who in some way are attached to the congregation?

W

William Howard 08:53

Well, you know, you're speaking of things that are so essential to a good strong fellowship, like pastoral counseling, being accessible to the members for fairly simple things, being present and engaged in our worship, and other ceremonial experiences. Well, for me, these are the priority. No matter what I do beyond the walls of this church, what is central to me, is that noon on Wednesday, Bill Howard is in the Chapel for for the midday service. On Thursday evenings, I don't care if the president of the country calls. I'm in Bible study at 7:30. Now, Bethany is also a church that is not only engaged beyond these walls. I think Bethany is a church that expects its pastor, to be engaged. And there's enormous support. When I chaired the board at Rutgers, I felt only the support. Now, I think it is the support that comes knowing that I still place the congregation first. We also have lay people who are able to step in and augment various things.

I mean, as you know, we hosted a conference related to the war on drugs. I think there were, there were well over 100 people from Bethany, participating in the conference, providing support and leadership in different ways. So, you know, we can have ideas, and be sure that they are personages in the congregation who can come and dig in and help to implement.

R

Robert Curvin 10:50

Now, you said that you had read about Newark, but it's hard to imagine that anybody could really know Newark by just what you read in the newspapers, some accurately portrayed sometimes not so accurate. But, but the, you know, what I found when I went to Israel, with all that I had read, it was nothing like seeing it. And so you've seen north now for better than 10 years. And there are a lot of lot of issues here that directly impinge on the kind of thinking that emanates out of a place like Bethany. What, what's your view about the city? And how do you, how would you identify some of the key issues that we need to get better traction on?

W

William Howard 11:48

Well, let me let me just go back to the point you made about not, you know, not having experienced Newark in quite the same way, yeah, in and out of Newark with no real responsibility. But by the way, as early as, say, 1970, 71, I guess. I remember visiting the Chad school in its earliest days and the committee for a Unified New Ark. And Amiri Baraka, who was at that time in Imamu, Amiri Baraka. We're having this conversation close on the heels of the passing of Donald Payne. I remember being invited by Donald to speak at the Y. And he was, I think, in the South Ward as a council member. And we stayed in close contact right on through when he ran for the Congress, I came in and gave a little talk in support of his candidacy. And, you know, even upon returning here as a pastor, we collaborated on certain things. So I had friends, Richard Roeper, you know, very good friend, we were contemporaries at Princeton. So I, you know, not only that I have a little familiarity with certain personalities, like Junius Williams, I knew Larry Hamm, I knew, I mean, he and I did certain things in the anti apartheid movement together when he was an undergraduate at Princeton. But I also came to Newark having a an understanding of post industrial cities, what happens to any city when capital flees, what what is left in its wake? And I knew that Newark from through my wife who grew up in New Jersey, born in Virginia, she used to tell me about the glory days of Newark, how she and her aunt would come to Newark, she lived in Princeton at the time, to shop. You know, she's told me about the grand Broad Street and so forth. So I knew in various ways, the glorious past but now Newark has been raped. The jobs, manufacturing not only have they left Newark, they've left the shores of America. I had all of that. I understood what happens to families, what happens to all of the community based institutions, what happens to the public schools, when this kind of thing happens. Now, of course, I have to be in Newark to know the nuances and idiosyncrasies of the culture. A lot of things I might have expected and there are some, some Newark only features you see, but what I see in Newark today is really mixed. I see as anyone who looks at this, broadly, lots of potential for Newark. I think economically assuming the reinvention of Newark in a certain sort of way, the future is bright in Newark. It's not, it's not bright in widget manufacturing. But because of its physical location and other assets, we would only have to scratch our heads to wonder why this thing hasn't exploded even more in a positive way. But I do have this concern. I think Newark over the next 25 to 50 years is a, a very pregnant, setting for complete gentrification. I'm worried about the future of current residents and the descendants, those who would like to make a home in Newark, what will

happen to them? Because right now, if we succeed in attracting more 21st century jobs to Newark, I worry a lot about the extent to which Newark residents will be able to compete for those jobs. When you look at the percentage of high paying jobs that exist in Newark today, that are not held by people who live here, it's just a precursor to the future. And I don't I'm not a resigning type of person. I'm constantly wondering now how can we intervene to head off this tragic possibility. But I do see Newark is having a very, very exciting, possible future. And I think I don't have to imagine it from whole cloth, because we see evidences of this now. The arts community, I'm just quite amazed by the creative people who elect to do their art right here in the city. And I'm not speaking NJPAC, I'm talking about, you know, people who operate at a lower scale and lower budgets, you know but do really amazing work.

R

Robert Curvin 17:26

Is there in ways, this is so wonderful, because this is where what I'm wrestling with, as my final words, in this book about the future of the city, and particularly the issues that are to say it another way, the issues that are related to the folks that really are not reached by all of these things that have been happening. And the question that I have is, how do you even have a, a productive conversation about that, given the nature of our politics, the the fact that Newark is so much of a city, suburban, civic community. The overwhelming majority of our civic organizations are actually run by people who live elsewhere. And it's, it's, it's very much like a developing country. I mean, there's a substantial brain drain issue. So I'm trying to I'm trying to think about how do you instigate the kind of critical forum that might say, if you really want to have a renaissance, right, you've got to really change the nature of the conversation. You have any thoughts on this?

W

William Howard 18:56

Let me tell you this, if you spend your time trying to generate this in the public sector, boy, you're spinning your wheels, and you're on a red dirt road in Georgia, it ain't going nowhere. It is in the independent sector, in the civic sector, right, where ordinary citizens are going to have to be ignited into this kind of dialogue and collective movement forward. We are a tad more polarized in Newark as a citizenry, not so much in terms of people running for office, they have to compete for the office. And if they have opponents they have to compete with them see, but I think I would love to see. And anytime you talking about an old city like Newark, you know, everything has been tried at least once. But I'm just imagining a city wide confederation of block associations where in wards, there are block associations. And that somewhere there is a group of really thoughtful people helping to develop some protocols and procedures for how they operate. But real democracy, and maybe every other year, a citywide Confederation, we need scientific organizing skills on the ground in Newark, we need to help define what are the priorities of people in Newark, so that they will know how to pursue them in an effective way. All of these things are here to be tried, I think adult literacy is a big issue. We've started here, as you may know, the training of adults who are eager to help another adult to improve their reading. This is vital. But I do think that it is in the independent sector. And somehow the universities could play some enhancement role. But I think I think I mean, look, I'm not cynical about government, I just think I understand what elected officials can and cannot do. Elected officials are very often not leaders, they are reflections. And therefore the grassroots must begin to give elected officials space, to run for office on things that really matter and really change things. Otherwise, if the constituency has no imagination, and some person pops up

running for office talking, innovation and so on, they immediately want to shut them down. And I think community engagement by people by civic leaders being tight and connected, especially to the most marginalized people is an essential character. And you even see some of that going on where there are organic leaders who, who connect with real people. I have to say Vivian Fraser at the at the Urban League is one of my favorite examples, you know, not up on a pedestal, what do you say a soapbox talkin but doing things that result in the empowerment of people. I'm going to share with you my own bias about this, that I begin with the proposition that African American elected officials have a different kind of obligation, given our unique history in this country. And that, indeed, the transition from protests and civil rights was articulated very clearly by people like Rustin(?) and King, who said that, you know, ultimately we would be a political force. But we would carry with us the same kind of ethos and ethos and values and objectives, to serve people. My sense-

R

Robert Curvin 23:22

Don't forget A Philip Randolph Oh, absolutely, absolutely. My sense is that and I can almost name the date, which is for another conversation, or at least the the time the era. Our leadership in this city, got divorced from that history. And, and ultimately sustained a politics that was common to Newark, even before they took over, but it was much of the same kind of petty dealing for personalizing government benefits, looking for looking for jobs. And in a way, I mean, I think this is the the narrative of the school system. And that, you know, we have had seven consecutive permanent African American superintendents, and some of them, I think, tried mightily, but could not move very effectively against the force(?)

W

William Howard 24:40

You mean, before the state takeover?

R

Robert Curvin 24:42

Before the state takeover before the state takeover. I think the first superintendent that Ken Gibson appointment was a very talented, very visionary individual, Stan Taylor from New York who ran a district in Brooklyn, but he had some faults, but there was no way in the world. But there was no way in the world they were going to let him. Let him do the job.

W

William Howard 25:09

Let me say this.

R

Robert Curvin 25:10

Yeah.

W

William Howard 25:11



William Howard 29:11

We say that politics is the art of the possible, right. And if you're in a radical sea change, like Gary, Indiana, we can name a few towns that face the radical sea change from a steel town. You see what has happened in Cleveland, I mean, you go all around America. Now, politicians, the art of the possible with no clue about how to address this systemically have to at the same time in real time appear to be addressing. And so the objective of the elected official is to, to damp down our expectations. See that. I mean, this is the natural outcome of someone who doesn't have a culture or a structure to invite collective assessment of the way forward, you're in power, you're expected to do something. And a mayor can't create work, a mayor can't ensure that if he invites an employer to the table, you are ready to take the job. See, this is an enourmous(?) kind of thing(?), which by the way, gets no better, because there's no civic dialogue about the problem. It's just sitting there. So, so Cory, already, is showing signs of weariness. He keeps fighting, because he's in the world of the art of the possible he's got to tell us, but Sharpe was the same. Ken was the same. They had to show us something. We demanded that of them, more or less. You see, even if they remained there for a long time, we began to murmur around the edges. Why didn't they, why don't they pick up the garbage, why don't they, well, do they need tax base. I think I learned from you 10s of 1000s of properties occupied by people who presumably paid taxes have disappeared. Absolutely. So I mean, the people we put an office, we assign the task of cleaning this thing up when it's actually a shared role. I think that in the civic sector, there has got to be some serious attention paid to the inability of too many people in the workforce, too many people in the community to access the modern workforce. If we have skills and knowledge and they won't hire us, we know how to deal with that. But, you know, if they if they say they have the door open and we can't come in



Robert Curvin 28:16

we can't come in.



28:19

You know, I mean, where does a 25 year old who doesn't know how to go on the internet enroll at a job recruitment program. So community based groups have to focus on those needs. And it is ever so clear to me how it is still the economy stupid(stupor?). If you look at what has happened with families with fathers fleeing, as we say, with with the schools, and the schools are related to the breakup of families, all of this is related to work. People being able to have a predictable income to bring home to put on the table to build something together. And I have options to talk about that.



Robert Curvin 29:11

But I know I'm asking rhetorically. Why isn't that the central conversation about our city today? I mean, that is the crux of the issue to me is I think that we've done pretty much of everything else except for the schools, which maybe we may be getting to that. But there's no there's no real civic effort about-



William Howard 29:51

Yeah, well, well, we can't stop trying though. I think. I would say that when I came to Newark, remember as a Newarker you know, I just arrived nevermind that it's a decade. Uh, I when I arrived, I remember when the City National Bank on Irvine Turner and Springfield. I remember the day it opened. I don't know if I told you this story before. But I was invited with two of my ministerial colleagues, Reverend Jefferson from Metropolitan and Reverend Watley, then and James. Bethany, of course, I just happened to be at Bethany. So they invited me. And I knew both Jefferson and Wadley before I arrived here, so. So then we were under a tent. Now listen at this imagery. There was a little white tent outside the bank, and the ceremony took place there. And somewhere on the program, they had the reverends to as they say, bless the occasion. So I said to my guys, I said, Man, I said, Look, what am I supposed to say? You know, I mean, I don't know these people. You know, so they said, Bill, just we'll let you go third just hang loose. Watch what we do, and then do your thing. You know? That's great. That's great. So they got up. And both of them spoke about how they had so many 1000s of dollars in, in fir- in a City National Bank and, and how they were solid behind the mission and blah, blah, blah. And I said, Oh, crap, you know, can a Reverend say that? I said, our bank is not City National, you know? I couldn't say that. By the way, our bank today, it's totally is City National. Okay. But so I stood up and I said, you know, I'm so honored to be invited, I'm glad to meet you. I'm the new guy. And I said, I'm from Georgia. And I said, you know, I was just thinking about the Hungry club at the butler Street Y in Atlanta. I said, I don't know if you know much about that. But this was something that emerged from the bowels of segregation, a need for black people to have a civic space for discussion about the welfare of our community in the city of Atlanta. So they weren't welcomed that the Lions Club and the buffalo club and whatever, they created the Hungry club. And every week, they would go down to the black Y on Butler street, they would have lunch and they would discuss the issues. From these discussions group many of the things that we admire about Atlanta, they were professors, they were lawyers, they were entrepreneurs, they were blah, blah, blah, no elected officials at that time. And the Hungry club goes on to day. And nobody who wants to win the Atlanta vote goes past the Hungry club. So I said, here we are under a proverbial tent. I said the only people who are not here, the academics and the artists. I wish we had a tent like this a proverbial tent in Newark, I would greatly benefit from this standing ovation. I didn't know what I'd said, Well, I was taken out to lunch by a guy who was now a deacon at our church, Zen Smith, and he said, I want to know more about this this Hungry club. I said, call it what you want. But a place where civic leaders who care about the future, the present of our city, with different ideas about things, sitting around a common table of respect, discussing what should be our future, and not necessarily charting a course for the future without appropriate engagement by the broader community. But at least having some ideas about this. I talk about this, even now. I talked recently with the a number of members of the Essex delegation to Trenton about this. I've talked to corporate leaders about this. And any number of people who are very effective, I think leaders in the community about this big tent.

R

Robert Curvin 34:49

Do you think that it would be possible to organize that kind of a forum in Newark and in in our context, should it be just the African American leadership?

W

William Howard 35:09

I do not think it should be just the African American leadership. It was that in Atlanta because of the structural setting

R Robert Curvin 35:17
Historical stuff, yeah.

W William Howard 35:20
And I think the the the, the diverse dimension that I would include in Newark is not so much racial. But class. There is definitely a presumption that downtown is like the, what do they call those districts in foreign countries. Like, not the inbound shot, but the duty free zone.

R Robert Curvin 35:50
Oh, I see.

W William Howard 35:52
So you go to Nairobi, and right around the Hilton Hotel you think you're in Manhattan. You go five blocks away just beyond the the Indian shops and you're in, you're in

R Robert Curvin 36:09
Another world.

W William Howard 36:10
What is this? So I think downtown is that kind of Island in Newark. North of City Hall. Okay. Now, Symphony Hall belongs to us. But North of City Hall, you're getting into the corporate territory, where people make big decisions. And it's all about downtown to hell with us right now. I don't think that the people who operate downtown and who talk about Newark, I'm talking about the leaders really want that. No, I think essentially, they wind up going to the dance, relatively alone, because nobody dances with them. You know, nobody goes with them.

R Robert Curvin 36:57
The world, the world is still amazingly separate, racially, even the town like Newark, where we've had, you know, better than 40 years of African American leadership. It's just quite astonishing, sometimes.

W William Howard 37:15
Sometimes even I'm gonna say, yeah, and here as a Georgian I'm not naive about this. But I'm

Sometimes even I'm gonna say, yeah, and here as a Georgian I'm not naive about this. But I'm gonna say, what makes me sometimes a bit angry, is how we use the word racism loosely. And I think I know what racism is. I also know how that stands apart from discrimination. Okay. And then we see too many things through the lens of race. One of the things when I talk to black people who don't have much money, I remind them that there's some black people who look almost like them, color skin tone, the whole nine yards, who are living in mansions they couldn't even imagine. You see. So there's something going on here, right, that needs a deeper analysis. And so I think the first thing we ought to do, if we embark upon creating a big 10, is to ensure that the most predictably excluded people are the first ones that are invited. You see, and as you saw to run your head through the characters in Newark, you can begin to identify who those people are. Because if you're putting X corporate executive, right next to so and so and so and so you know, you're serious. And then we have to have a focus. Now, I don't know if you heard about that conversation that Ras Baraka initiated?

R

Robert Curvin 39:00

At Essex County College? Yes, yes, I did hear about it.

W

William Howard 39:04

I chatted with Ras the other night and he said he's envisioning another round. And then some of us suggested maybe a narrower focus. Honestly, the best things that we've ever seen happen start started out somewhat imperfectly. And they evolved into something great, am I right? I think we ought to build on that we ought we ought to insist. And even those of us who are invited to speak can speak about it.

R

Robert Curvin 39:37

Were you on the panel?

W

William Howard 39:38

Yes, yes. And I went to the panel exactly, because I saw a whole bunch of unlikelys there and I said, Well, great. Yeah, I can go to that. I'm sitting next here next to Fran Adubato. And then there's so and so and so and that one over there, Amiri's there, you know and so forth. And let me tell you, it was essentially a very civil, not dodging issues, but it was essentially a civil exchange. I think the audience was not necessarily accustomed to that level of civility. And so they began to introduce certain dynamics of polarization. But if we are leaders, we can speak back to it. You know, I remember, because we were using, as you might have heard, we were using where do we go from here, where do we go from here, chaos in our community, the King book, his last book. So, sticking with the text, I said, let's go to and understanding what's happening here in Newark. Let's go to another famous quote in that book. Now, what was interesting is Ras was sitting there with the text right in front of him. And he was going into the book, getting questions and saying, what do you say to this? I said, well go to that quote, where King says, We must, we must never be on the wrong side of the world revolution. And remember, just as we have been evolving into something, Mozambique has been involved, evolving Angola, now, South Africa, Zimbabwe, you know, these were and other places in the

world, but let's speak only of Africa. Right. Let's find out where they've been going and why. And you may find there some similar dynamics. We're all connected here. That was an intriguing notion. Yeah.

R

Robert Curvin 41:43

Yeah. Very intriguing. Yeah. I have to tell you that I have I ran into Amiri one evening at the library shortly after Ras was elected. And I said to him, you know, why does your son really need to be both a high school principal, and a counselor? I said, you know, he's got one of the most critically important schools in the city. It's a new school, you know, why doesn't why can't he just want to be the best principal? And Amiri says to me, you know, he's got to feed his kids. He's got to, you know, he everybody everybody else was doing it. And I said, Well, you know, Amiri, I said, that's the last thing I expected to hear from you, everybody else is doing it. You know, we don't do what everybody else does. Now, the upshot of the story is that anytime I walk by Ras, so I don't get invited to these- He's heard about the question without question.

W

William Howard 42:52

You know, where I go, more often than not, yeah. When I'm in the midst of these issues, I go to Freire. I'm telling you, his views on how the oppress mimic their oppressors. Right, it's extraordinarily compelling. I had the good fortune of knowing Paulo Freire. And it was in that part of his life when he had written pedagogy. And he went, you know, most people are not aware that he was an educator. And he had a certain Christian slash Marxist orientation, in terms of analysis. He had a Marxist tool, right but he was also influenced by Christian theology, especially liberation theology. And he became a, an education staff person for the World Council of Churches. In his later years. And I, I was, I was very involved in that world council as a head of their program to combat racism. But in later life, I was on their Commission for Human Rights, which was one of the key informants of the UN's religious liberty questions. And their Commissioner of Human Rights. So I went off into Geneva and had lunch with many times. And I'll say that this notion of a new paradigm is hard to inculcate. So as I look at black electoral politics in America, I would like to say we have been brilliant students, of the thing that we hated the most. The structures of power ethics that we inherited, that were, were weights on our shoulder, we have inherited and mastered. Whether it's how we campaign, how we raise money, how we fund issues, how we operate. Well, this is the point that I, I feel very deeply that. And I raised this with someone, a friend who said, Do you think there's a separate standard for black politicians? And I said, Yes. I said, our history tells us that it's rational, and it's justified. We wanted inclusion, Robert. We didn't want to transform. We wanted to be included. Now, we were never one or the other. But you see, we are opting for inclusion. I gave a talk in North Carolina back in 1981, I think it was. A gentleman whose name I probably could remember if I worked at it hard enough. Beautiful man. He was the president of the North Carolina State Conference of branches. That's the way he referred, I think he was an undertaker by by tr-, by profession, he owned funeral home. And boy, I'm looking at his face. But I was invited there at the behest of Kenyon Burke. Oh, Kenyon. You don't remember Kenyon?

R

Robert Curvin 46:32

Oh, of course. Was that who you were thinking of?

W

William Howard 46:34

No, no Kenyon was prior to coming to the staff of the National Council of Churches, had been the policy advisor to Benjamin Hooks. Just before he came over to the National Council, which was the job from which he retired. But Kenyan knew this man through his NAACP circles, and basically said to this guy, you know, you should invite this guy to talk. So the man invited me to Charlotte and I love this guy. You know, he was, I never knew he E D Nixon but you know, he's, he's sort of an E D Nixon type character, you know, very sophisticated, very down home, straight talking guy, you know, he called me up on the phone before I got to North Carolina. He said, Reverend, he said, Now, Burke told me that you you're going to tell our people the truth. I said, Yes, sir. I hope to. He said, Well, don't come down here with all that theatrical stuff. I want to I want them to hear the real deal. He said, Can you deliver on that? I said, Well, I'm gonna try. I came down and I was sort of, I was encouraged. It wasn't like I had to shift. I was encouraged. And I gave a talk called "A new paradigm for Freedom". And I asked the question of this audience, is freedom for you, having more of what the white man has, you see that the white man being the symbol of oppression in terms of race. And I talked about the vagaries of that brand of freedom. You know, getting a slice of a rotten pie. And I unpacked that I have a couple of my assistants who have asked me to pull that out somewhere. But I have it there in the house, I'll find it, it seems to me that is the question that we need to come back to what does a legacy of slavery and oppression in this land produce? Does it produce people who are agents of national redemption and improvement? Or people who simply join the party?

R

Robert Curvin 49:02

Well, isn't this doesn't this raise the question of, of choice and will?

W

William Howard 49:09

Sure and sin and sin. That's right. Sin defined not as going on the bus to Atlantic City. But being so overwhelmed by the complexity of what we face, you opt for personal survival. You lose your capacity to extend and shall I say, expose yourself, for the sake of others. You circle the wagons. And we have now made that a whole culture. You know, I'm not going to worry about these people. I'm not going to call them the names that we would call them. I'm going to look after me. And of course now with the with the evacuation of Newark by capital that Nell Painter tells me started right after the Second World War.

R


Robert Curvin 50:05


Absolutely.


W


William Howard 50:08


We have politics as an industry. It's your way to earn a living.


 Robert Curvin 50:13
Well ever more so yeah, ever more. So that's why there's

 William Howard 50:19
And you know people have to eat, Robert,

 Robert Curvin 50:21
Of course they have to eat

 William Howard 50:23
you see?

 Robert Curvin 50:24
but when it becomes a, an enterprise in which it basically is meted out to a narrow select group of individuals. It's so completely undermines any democratic notions of participation and governance for everybody and obligation and all that.

 William Howard 50:55
And we know that democracy is not something that is allowed. It is something demanded so if the citizenry is just drifting along. I mean, it's a dance, it really is a dance. It takes as the saying goes two to tango. It's saying the same thing with the economy. Look, I'm gonna go out and get the best training, technical know how, whatever, whatever that I can find. And I'm gonna demand that you give me a job. But if I don't do my power, my demand is weak and hollow. That's true on every level at every level, it's like a philanderer, the male philanderer, demanding fidelity from his wife. Come on. This is, as Martin says, and we often interpret him in a way that is improper. We're all bound together by one common garment of destiny. That means there's a reciprocity and mutuality, that will make your head swim. And that's why I always say to people, if you if you think old so and so has no chance to get in heaven, like you do. You have a selective memory. You thought, not only have you forgotten all that stuff. You think God forgot. See?

 52:26

 William Howard 52:26

The truth is we if you if I want you to show up on time, I have to show up on time in so many words.

R

Robert Curvin 52:35

Yeah. By the way, did you hear that at the last advisory School advisory board meeting, which was so raucous it was just absolutely disturbing to me. I got up and spoke. I spoke.

W

William Howard 52:49

Okay, I did hear about the raucous part. But I didn't hear about you speaking.

R

Robert Curvin 52:53

You didn't hear that I spoke I spoke. It was unfortunately, it was late, but I got up. And I said, you know, in fact, several people, including Marquis had invoked Dr. King as supporting their view that the schools should not close and that this should not happen and so on. And I said, you know, I tell you, I'm, I'm here to basically say that, you know, I know the schools closing is really emotional and deeply felt and so on. And it's complicated. I said, But do we have to have this anger and name calling and, and I'll tell you later, what Joe Del Grosso did, which was one of the ugliest things I've ever seen a white man do in a black audience.

W

William Howard 53:39

Actually, I heard about that. Yeah, that's what I heard

R

Robert Curvin 53:43

It was horrible. But anyway, while I'm speaking, a guy in the back of the room is yelling to me read a letter from a Birmingham Jail, as though I had not read it. Read a letter from the Birmingham Jail. I mean, that is the kind of ignorance Yes, that is become almost,

W

William Howard 54:08

And I think at that time, we were paying the musicians a certain amount of money, not much at all. And the question would always be how did the offering measure up. Now the offering supersedes the amount, and we're raising the price for the musicians. But the point is, I've been thinking how can we use that forum. Yeah. And I've been, let me just say, you remember I told you when your book is published, I want you to come and give a talk. But I'm going to say to you, as you are naming it, yeah. We've got to sit back and think about ways that we can begin to change this. Whether it is through reading clubs all over the city, some env-, I'm been thinking look at the Jazz Vespers, this started out as a little modest little effort. I remember how the deacons used to look over our shoulder because they were willing to help seed this event. But they were fully thinking that one day it would be self sustaining.

R

Robert Curvin 55:22

I'm gonna, I am saying right now that I'm going to be about talking to people. And I think I have a message. And I want to I want to be here at Bethany to do whatever we can do to maybe young people, old people, in between.

W

William Howard 55:42

Beautiful. Yeah. Now the book, the book club is ready to feature your book. Yeah. But here's, here's the here's the framework, right? We're not at the point where we can have virtually unheard of artists and people still come because they know that the artist is going to be outstanding. We had a brilliant young pianist here. Right. Who just released her first CD. I don't know that it's even on the market yet. Shami Royston. I asked Jerry Allen. She ever heard of Shami Royston. No, I haven't I haven't heard. Now Jerry keeps her eye on all these young kids. This Shami Royston is outstanding?

R

Robert Curvin 56:24

Wow.

W

William Howard 56:25

But about four or five times we have invited an author to speak at four. That thing is at six, to speak at for about their book usually. And people come early. And we've had Ogletree come. Easy Rollins who writes the books on LA. Oh, come on, you know the guy.

R

Robert Curvin 57:02

Oh know who you mean. Yeah. Right. The fiction writer. Yeah. Right. Yeah.

W

William Howard 57:07

He's been here (unintelligable). Yeah. We had Cornell Cornell was here.

R

Robert Curvin 57:11


Well, I'm sure he packed the house.


W


William Howard 57:13


Yeah. But you see they come. They, they in fact, Cornell came on the day. And this is all


coincidental in the church, we say it's divinely. Cornell gave his talk. There was a slight break. And then Randy Weston is playing the piano. Wow. And we're celebrating Amiri's 75th birthday.


 Robert Curvin 57:44
Wow. Okay. Oh, my God


 57:46
And Randy, knowing that we were going to do this composed a musical thing for Amiri, in honor of Amiri


 Robert Curvin 57:58
Oh, my God, you really know how to do it.

 William Howard 58:00
But this is a way of engaging people. And on Newark. I mean, that kind of thing you're doing. To engage open a dialogue

 Robert Curvin 58:09
This would me, to me this would be the the fulfillment really of what I'm trying to do. I mean, I'm really-

 William Howard 58:18
I'm gonna say my speech at the at the tail end of this event at about 10 minutes to six. My speech goes like this. Dr. Curvin, this, you've only stirred us up now. We're going to have to break for the for the Vespers now, right. But we're going to set a date tomorrow, on when the next continuation of this discussion will begin.

 Robert Curvin 58:41
Book me for the year. You book me for the year. You know what you can even do book me on Sunday. We're almost out of our hour. But I got to ask you one other question. I want to ask you to say a little bit about what you think about politics today in Newark. And how you- I know that I have a quote that was published in the paper where you said that the people really have lost confidence or trust in the mayor.



W

William Howard 59:16

I wonder if they have. I can't say for sure. I see signs of that. And I shared that with him.

R

Robert Curvin 59:24

Right. Well, he had to read it in the paper, I'm sure. Which didn't make him very happy.

W

William Howard 59:30

Yeah, I had a very good meeting with the mayor, in the fall of last year 2011. around some of the things he noted, were being attributed to me in the media. So I had a good opportunity to share with him directly from the horse's mouth, right. And I said, you know, let me just say that you and I are both not inexperienced in being quoted in the media and if someone quotes me, so egregiously, I'll call them. But if they're a little off, I don't bother, I think that goes with the trade. But here you have me ask me any questions. And it was that kind of good frank exchange. And I will say to you, in his own way, I believe the mayor is trying very hard. But I do believe that our politics in Newark are very conventional and predictable. We have different actors, and so forth. Clearly, you know, we have different actors who are not in Chicago or someplace. But there were our politics is pretty conventional, you know, the way we manipulate voters with money and, and half truths about our opponents and so forth. And, and to borrow from an expression you've quoted earlier, they all do it. Now, to some extent, to the tango, that constituency of voters have to be held responsible for this, because this is the stuff they fall for. I think we need and Newark has some kind of history and culture that would lend itself to this, as I recall and you were present. So I'm reading about, as you know, you know, the Black Power conference and all of these citizen uprisings and coalescing the election of kin and so forth. So there's something in Newark's belly that would lend itself to a political movement that also elects people. That's what I do.